

SWRPA

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TO: Planning and Development Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly

FROM: Dr Floyd Lapp, Executive Director of the South Western Regional Planning Agency

Re: Senate Bill # 371 – An Act Concerning Intermunicipal Cooperation
Senate Bill # 384 – An Act Promoting Regionalism in the State
House Bill # 6389 – An Act Concerning Regionalization
House Bill # 6463 – An Act Concerning Membership on Regional Planning Agencies
House Bill # 6585 – An Act Concerning Regionalism

My name is Floyd Lapp, and I am Executive Director of the South Western Regional Planning Agency (SWRPA). For 47 years, SWRPA has been coordinating intermunicipal and regional planning for the municipalities of Stamford, Norwalk, Greenwich, Darien, New Canaan, Weston, Westport and Wilton.

SWRPA was pleased with the findings and recommendations of the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee's study concerning "Connecticut's Regional Planning Organizations" (December 2007), especially the provision that each of the three types of Regional Planning Organizations (RPOs) currently permitted under Connecticut law, those being Regional Planning Agencies, Regional Councils of Governments, and Regional Councils of Elected Officials, should continue to be authorized, and that one form of regional planning structure was not superior to the other. In my 45 years of experience, I have found that the members, not necessarily the structure, make these organizations work.

We are here today because we are very concerned that a portion of the regional planning function and structure may be crumbling. For example, *Senate Bill # 371 – An Act Concerning Intermunicipal Cooperation*, *Senate Bill # 384 – An Act Promoting Regionalism in the State*, and *House Bill # 6389 – An Act Concerning Regionalization* and *House Bill # 6585 – An Act Concerning Regionalism* each would specifically permit Councils of Elected Officials to establish programs of cooperation between member towns as part of an OPM administered municipal collaboration program. *In our opinion, this type of program can be successfully administered by all three forms of RPOs, especially since SWRPA has a very close working relationship with its chief elected officials through its Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO).* Both SWRPA and the South Western Region MPO meet monthly and regularly address many of the same matters of regional interest as the aforementioned proposed legislation.

House Bill # 6585 also proposes a \$1 million appropriation to OPM for grants to RPOs for the specific purpose of facilitating multi-municipal collaboration agreements, which would be helpful to RPOs if the proposed elimination of \$1 million in State Grant-in-Aid (SGIA) to RPOs were to occur. The broader issue is that SGIA to RPOs provides a significant percentage of funding to RPOs in support of vital non-transportation related regional planning matters, such as updating the Regional Plan of Conservation and Development, addressing related housing and environmental matters and serving as the matching funds for critical efforts, including our Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan. *SWRPA strongly believes that the \$1*

million in SGIA funds must be maintained to allow RPOs to achieve a well balanced work program that sufficiently addresses all regional planning needs, including intermunicipal cooperation efforts, and that the specific appropriation proposed in House Bill # 6585 would not serve as a sufficient replacement for the SGIA.

House Bill # 6463 - An Act Concerning Membership on Regional Planning Agencies, would require the chief elected officials of each member municipality of a Regional Planning Agency to also serve as a representative of the Agency. This recommendation would impose a particular structure to Regional Planning Agencies. In our view, this arrangement is already functional within SWRPA through its close interaction with the MPO.

Thank you for providing us with the opportunity to comment.